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Michelle Dutrow, Superintendent

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Greetings WB Families:

I hope this communication finds each of you and your families healthy and safe. As we continue to battle COVID-19 across our nation, we now understand that we are a long way from the end of this disease and its hold on us. Understanding that we must plan accordingly within a COVID-19 environment, we here at West Branch are hard at work getting ready for the 2020-2021 school year. We are committed to doing everything we can to provide a quality education for all students while providing for the health and safety of students and staff.

At this time, West Branch is planning a full return to school in late August when the new school year begins. With that being said, we do understand that how we start the year is greatly dependent on the path of the virus over the next two months. Moreover, we further understand that how we start the school year might change based on the path of the virus once cold weather sets back in and we move into winter when a possible resurgence has been predicted. Given the need for flexibility, the District will have contingency plans should our circumstances warrant a school schedule adjustment or closure at any time.

The District has developed a brief survey for all parents/guardians to complete within the next week. This survey will provide the Administration with important information needed to formalize our school reopening plans for late August. Please be advised that if we do not receive a survey back for your child/children, we will have staff contact you via telephone to complete the survey with you. So that you can make informed decision about how to answer the questions, this letter provides the basic overview of the safety guidelines that will be recommended for students and staff when school reopens in late August. We are aware that this does not cover every safety measure that the district will be undertaking but serves as the broad summary. Changes will be made as recommendations change or our unique situation dictates.

1. Bus/Van Transportation: Masks will be required for all drivers and students while on the bus and when transitioning into the school each morning or out to the bus each afternoon.
2. Hallway Transitions: Masks will be worn by all students and staff while moving about in the hallways. Additionally, travel lanes and social distancing in the hallways will be established.
3. Classrooms: Students will not be required to wear a mask while in class unless otherwise indicated by a parent/guardian. Staff will wear masks at the start of the school year, and we will reassess that need as further guidance is provided from the Department of Health and CDC. Student desks will be socially distanced at the recommended distance of 6 feet, to the greatest extent possible, but not to be less than 4 feet.
4. Cafeteria: Meals will be pre-packaged and/or pre-plated for students. Keypads will not be used by students for payment purposes but rather handled by a cashier. Tableware and condiments will be pre-packaged or served by a cafeteria worker. Students will be socially distanced, to the greatest extent possible. Masks will be worn into the cafeteria but removed while seated.
5. Handwashing/Hand Sanitizer: Staff will be providing students with increased opportunities for hand washing or using hand sanitizer either every hour or after any transition in the building.
6. Cleaning/Disinfecting: Our shift schedules and task lists for custodians are being revised to allow for more cleaning of high touch areas during the school day and more frequent cleaning each evening of high use areas.

After collecting input from each family, Administration will formalize our plans, seek the required Board approval, and submit the plan to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) prior to the start of school in August. In the meantime, we will continue to rework our daily operation so that we are well-prepared to conduct school in a COVID-19 environment. The survey can be found at the following link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfl9Leyr0xBc36mqBHCZfosJ5wWyWqBYNgtLJRLdrZIr4kBIg/viewform?usp=sf_link

Once again, I ask for your patience and flexibility as we move into the 2020-2021 school year. I do not think any of us should be expecting to resume our normal operation anytime soon and we will need to monitor and adjust as the virus dictates and our state government and health officials mandate. Please know we are very excited to have the children back with us in the fall and will continue to work tirelessly to provide for their educational and safety needs.

Micki Dutrow
Superintendent of Schools